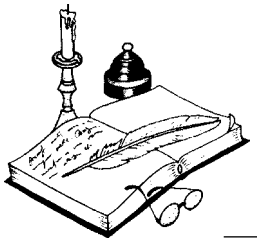

Physician's Lexicon

The Harsh Vocabulary of Intemperance

"And Noah began to be a husbandman, and he planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine and was drunken." Thus we learn from Genesis (9:20-21) the Scriptural origins, the antiquity of alcoholism; and we learn further that intemperance was an impediment to mankind even before mankind learned to be fruitful, to multiply and replenish the earth.

Alcoholism, as a human burden, is widespread; and the descriptive words of alcoholism are similarly abundant and varied.

The word, alcohol, descends from the Arabic *al-kuhl* meaning the antimony and earlier from the Hebrew, *kahal*, meaning a fine powder such as antimony (used as an eye shadow and often called *kohl*; and by inference, something intense or spirited.)

An older medical term for alcoholism was dipsomania, derived from the Greek, *dipsa*, meaning thirst (for any fluids), and *mania*, also Greek, for madness. Dipsosis, a term often used in tropical medicine texts, defines thirst in general; and adipsia, the pathological absence of thirst. *Dipsosaurus dorsalis* (the Sonoran desert iguana), sometimes called the thirsty lizard, is a common creature to the hot Mojave desert lands.

Oenomania, a rarely employed diagnosis for chronic alcoholism, takes advantage of the Greek root for wine, *oeno-*, as employed in such terms as oenology, the study of wines; oenanthic, the odors of wine; oenophile, a lover of wine; and Oenone, in Greek mythology, the nymph-wife of Paris.

Temperance (and intemperance) are from the Latin, *temperans*, meaning to moderate, control, regulate, or diminish (as in the Scottish hymn, "Temper my spirits, Oh Lord".) The French infinitive, *tremper*, means to soak and sometimes dilute with water (and inferentially, therefore, lessen the action of the wine.).

An inebriant, a drunkard, is from the Latin, *inebriatus,* meaning an intoxicated human. The English word, brio, meaning vivacity, vigor, aliveness is also derived from the same root.

The street vocabulary for alcoholism is vast and multilingual, including such distasteful descriptives as barfly, souse, boozer (from a Middle Dutch, *busen*, meaning to carouse) , rummy, vodka (from the diminutive of an older Russian word, *voda*, meaning water) and whisky-head (the word, whisky, derives from the Gaelic, *usquebaugh*, meaning, literally, the water of life.)

– Stanley M. Aronson, MD

Vital Statistics

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Rhode Island Monthly Vital Statistics Report Provisional Occurrence Data from the Division of Vital Records

Underlying Cause of Death	Reporting Period			
	December 2010	12 Months Ending with December 2010		
	Number (a)	Number (a)	Rates (b)	YPLL (c)
Diseases of the Heart	222	2,257	214.3	3,112.0
Malignant Neoplasms	193	2,294	217.8	5,956.5
Cerebrovascular Diseases	41	457	43.4	684.5
Injuries (Accidents/Suicide/Homicide)	66	637	60.5	10,113.5
COPD	47	511	48.5	475.0

Vital Events	Reporting Period		
	June 2011	12 Months Ending with June 2011	
	Number	Number	Rates
Live Births	971	11,702	11.1*
Deaths	716	9,926	9.4*
Infant Deaths	(3)	(65)	5.6#
Neonatal Deaths	(3)	(65)	5.6#
Marriages	742	6,144	5.8*
Divorces	300	3,332	3.2*
Induced Terminations	361	4,054	346.4#
Spontaneous Fetal Deaths	44	651	55.6#
Under 20 weeks gestation	(41)	(570)	57.4#
20+ weeks gestation	(3)	(79)	6.8#

(a) Cause of death statistics were derived from the underlying cause of death reported by physicians on death certificates.

(b) Rates per 100,000 estimated population of 1,053,209. (www.census.gov)

(c) Years of Potential Life Lost (YPLL).

Note: *Totals represent vital events that occurred in Rhode Island for the reporting periods listed above. Monthly provisional totals should be analyzed with caution because the numbers may be small and subject to seasonal variation.*

* Rates per 1,000 estimated population
\# Rates per 1,000 live births